- Ctrl+K
- Ctrl+J
-
-
-
-

tell me about the two hippies who took on mcdonalds and won

The story you're referring to is the famous **McLibel case** (officially *McDonald's Corporation v Steel & Morris*), often described as a David vs. Goliath battle where two ordinary, left-leaning environmental activists—frequently called "hippies" or "hippy heroes" in media and retrospectives—took on the global fast-food giant McDonald's and achieved a moral and public relations victory, even though McDonald's technically "won" on some points.

The two people were:

- **Helen Steel** — a former gardener and activist.
- **David Morris** — a former postman, single father, and activist.

They were part of a small London-based group called **London Greenpeace** (unrelated to the larger Greenpeace organization), which criticized multinational corporations.

In the mid-1980s, the group created and distributed a six-page leaflet titled *"What's Wrong with McDonald's: Everything They Don't Want You to Know"*. It accused McDonald's of various issues, including:

- Exploiting workers and paying low wages.
- Promoting unhealthy food and misleading marketing (especially to children).
- Contributing to environmental destruction (e.g., rainforest clearing for beef production).
- Animal cruelty in sourcing.
- Being involved in economic imperialism and misusing resources.

McDonald's, known for aggressively protecting its image, sent private investigators to infiltrate activist groups and identify distributors. In 1990–1991, they sued Steel and Morris (and others who apologized and settled) for **libel** under tough English libel laws, where the burden of proof is on the defendants to prove claims true.

What made it legendary:

- The trial lasted over **314 days** (about 3 years of court time from 1994–1997), the longest civil trial in English history.
- Steel and Morris represented themselves (no lawyers, due to lack of legal aid for libel cases), facing McDonald's team of top barristers and estimated £10 million+ in legal resources.
- They called witnesses, presented evidence, and cross-examined McDonald's executives, exposing damaging details about the company's practices (e.g., on nutrition, animal treatment, and employment).

Two Hippies vs McDonald's: Video story - Grok

- In 1997, the judge ruled that some leaflet claims were true (e.g., McDonald's exploited children via advertising, paid low wages, and was cruel to animals in some ways), but others were false or not proven. McDonald's won the case technically and was awarded £60,000 in damages (later reduced/waived).
- Steel and Morris refused to pay and McDonald's never enforced it.

The real "win" for the pair:

- It was a massive **PR disaster** for McDonald's—seen as bullying two penniless activists.
- The case highlighted corporate overreach, free speech issues, and the criticized claims.
- In 2005, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the UK denied them a fair trial (no legal aid, imbalance vs. corporation), violating their rights under the European Convention on Human Rights.
- It inspired documentaries (like *McLibel* by Franny Armstrong), books, and ongoing activism.

This case is often celebrated as ordinary people standing up to a powerful corporation and exposing truths, even if not a full legal victory. It's very different from the more commonly misunderstood U.S. hot coffee case (Stella Liebeck), which involved an elderly woman and burns, not activists or "hippies."

If this doesn't match what you had in mind or you'd like more details (e.g., on specific claims or the documentary), let me know!

50 sources

Upgrade to SuperGrok